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rather regret that his good sense should not have induced him to conceal them, than quarrel with him for entertaining them ; for we believe so much in the white paper system of Locke, and in the omnipotency of these causes, that we can hardly find fault with a man for not erasing opinions and feelings which have been ingrained perhaps with the very texture of his soul.

ART. III.—*A Biographical Memoir of Hugh Williamson, M. D. LL. D. &c. by David Hosack, M. D. LL. D. &c.* New York. C. S. Van Winkle, 1820. pp. 91.

DR. WILLIAMSON'S name is too well known to our readers from his writings, to have required a particular notice of a work like that before us. We call the attention of our readers to Dr. Hosack's biographical memoir, wholly on account of the anecdote contained in it of the famous letters of Hutchinson and Oliver. We give the anecdote as it stands in Dr. Hosack's words.

‘ We now come to an event, memorable by the commotion it excited at the time, and by the magnitude of the consequences which have since arisen from it : I refer to the discovery of the celebrated letters of Hutchinson and Oliver : and here I beg leave to call your notice to a few of the earlier circumstances of the late revolutionary war, in order to communicate a fact hitherto unrevealed.

‘ Although the disturbances which originated in the famous stamp act, had nearly subsided with the repeal of that noxious measure, and returning sentiments of friendship were every day becoming more manifest, yet new obstacles to a permanent reconciliation appeared in the attempts of the British administration, to render certain officers of the provincial governments dependant on the crown alone. This measure of the court gave particular offence to the colony of Massachusetts, from the peculiarly obnoxious character of their governor, who, at times impelled by avarice and by the love of dominion, had, in furtherance of his schemes of self aggrandizement, uniformly manifested the most determined support to the views and measures of the mother country.

‘ However discreditable to his reputation it may be, certain it is, that governor Hutchinson was secretly labouring to subvert the chartered rights of the colony, whose interests he had sworn to protect. His agency in procuring the passage of the stamp

act was more than suspected, and apparently upon reasonable grounds.

‘The illustrious Franklin, who had recently rendered himself conspicuous by his examination before a committee of the British privy council, and who at this period resided in London, as agent for the colonies of Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, obtained possession, through the agency of a *third* person, of certain letters written by governor Hutchinson ; secretary Oliver, afterwards lieutenant governor ; Charles Paxton, Esq. and other servants of the crown, [Thomas Moffat, Robert Auchmuty, Nathaniel Rogers, George Rome] ; and sent them from Boston to Thomas Whately, Esq. member of Parliament, and a private secretary of Lord Grenville.’

After an account of Franklin’s appearance before the privy council, and Mr. Wedderburne’s insolent abuse of him, he adds,

‘But it is time that I should declare to you, that this *third* person from whom Dr. Franklin received these famous letters, (and permit me to add that this is the first time the fact has been publicly disclosed,) was Dr. Hugh Williamson.

‘I have before stated his mission in behalf of the academy. Dr. Williamson had now arrived in London. Feeling a lively interest in the momentous questions then agitated, and suspecting that a clandestine correspondence, hostile to the interest of the colonies, was carried on between Hutchinson and certain leading members of the British cabinet, he determined to ascertain the truth by a bold experiment.

‘He had learned that governor Hutchinson’s letters were deposited in an office different from that in which they ought regularly to have been placed ; and having understood that there was little exactness in the transaction of the business of that office ; (it is believed that it was the office of a particular department of the treasury ;) he immediately repaired to it, and addressed himself to the chief clerk, not finding the principal within : assuming the demeanour of official importance, he peremptorily stated that he had come for the last letters that had been received from governor Hutchinson and Mr. Oliver, noticing the office in which they ought regularly to have been placed. Without a question being asked, the letters were delivered. The clerk, doubtless, supposed him to be an authorized person from some other public office. Dr. Williamson immediately carried them to Dr. Franklin, and the next day left London for Holland.

‘I received this important fact from a gentleman of high respectability, now living ; with whom, as the companion and friend of his early days, Dr. Williamson had entrusted the secret.’

We shall not trifle long with the good sense of our readers, by discussing the morality of this famous disclosure. We do not justify it upon the ground, that there is not a post office in a capital city in Europe, unprovided with false seals, for the more convenient opening and reading of the letters that pass through it ; and that for an official agent to murmur that his correspondence has been violated, were as childish as for a general to complain that the enemy had attacked him, before his troops had had an opportunity to fortify themselves with a hearty dinner. Nor did it ever occur to us, that the safety of public documents in public offices was to depend on the good nature and delicacy of those whose most momentous interests were wrapped up in those documents ; but who ought not, for the world, to be guilty of so rude and disobliging an act, as helping themselves to them, when they have a chance.

It is true, Mr. Wedderburne, who seems to have been very anxious to appropriate to himself as large a portion as could come to the share of a subaltern, of the glory and comfort of depriving his master of a continent, undertook to set up the distinction, that this was a private correspondence. A private correspondence indeed, between such simple, unofficial characters as governors, judges, members of parliament, and secretaries of ministers of state, upon such romantic and sentimental topics as the state of the colonies, the views of the leading men, and the right and means of reducing them ! And yet a distinction so insulting to the common sense of the privy council as this, was made by Mr. Wedderburne the ground of the most abusive ribaldry toward Franklin, so indecent as to make the lords of the council laugh aloud. Lords of council laughing aloud at Franklin !

The true justification of the disclosure of these letters is that a state of war really, if not formally, existed between England and the colonies at the time. The letters themselves were actually hostile letters, traitorously written by his majesty's servants in America, in the design and with the effect of exasperating the government against the colonies.

But we suppose no great doubt is now entertained that letters like these are a lawful prize, wherever found. The only question now of interest is the agency of Dr. Williamson in procuring them. This agency is, as Dr. Hosack observes in his memoir, now for the first time made publicly known,

and the question naturally suggests itself, on what authority it is asserted. On this subject Dr. Hosack gives us no light but that which is contained in the following sentence. 'I received this important fact from a gentleman of high respectability now living, with whom, as the companion and friend of his early days, Dr. Williamson had entrusted the secret.' We have ourselves been favoured with an opportunity of reading the letter of the gentleman here alluded to, and another of Bishop White of Philadelphia testifying to the respectability of its author, both of which letters, with other documents relating to the same subject, will, we understand, be given to the public, among the transactions of the New York Historical Society.

This curious anecdote, therefore, as the case stands, rests upon the authority of a gentleman of Philadelphia, of ascertained respectability, the friend of Dr. Williamson from his youth, who professes to have received it from Dr. Williamson himself. We shall here state fairly our impressions as to the claim of the anecdote, under such circumstances, to be called authentic, and the probability that it is so.

In the first place, we do not agree with the opinion, which we have occasionally heard expressed, and by respectable persons, that there is an antecedent presumption against the thing, and that the rules and practice of the offices of state in London make it highly improbable that the letters could have been thus withdrawn without authority. We see no such improbability. There is none in their being in an office, for that would be to allow the justice of the ridiculous pretence that they were private letters; whereas they were letters of public agents, to a member of parliament, secretary of a minister of state. That so many letters from so many persons should have been together, as upon almost any supposition they must have been, at the time of their being taken, is also a circumstance, which renders it probable that they had been selected and deposited for some public purpose, in a public office. We are equally unable to see any antecedent improbability in their having been withdrawn from the office, in such a way as Dr. Williamson is described to have taken them. In a regular official way, they could not have been withdrawn without a treachery on the part of the principal or clerks, unlikely in itself, and very unlikely to have remained undiscovered. Mr. Wedderburne says, 'the letters could not have come to Dr. Franklin by *fair* means; the

writers did not give them to him, nor yet did the deceased correspondent, [Mr. Whately] who, from our intimacy, would have told me of it.' This seems to us to be correctly reasoned, if you change *fair* into *regular* or *official*. And when it is said that the rules and practice of the offices of state make it impossible that Dr. Williamson could have gotten possession of the letters in the way stated in the anecdote, we conceive that this amounts merely to the assertion, that they were not officially and regularly communicated to Dr. Franklin. This no one is disposed to deny. And no one can surely take upon himself to state, that the offices of state in London are so managed, that it is impossible a clerk should be imposed upon by an artifice like that to which Dr. Williamson is said to have resorted. On the contrary, that some such means were practised, we cannot doubt, and for the reasons assigned by Mr. Wedderburne. It is very certain that Mr. Whately could not have surrendered them: it is equally certain that no clerk or principal in lord Grenville's office would knowingly have entrusted them to Dr. Franklin, or any body likely to give them to him; and they must therefore have been obtained by some surprize. It may be just worthy of remark, however, that Gordon intimates that a suspicion attached to Mr. Temple. 'There is something mysterious,' says that writer, 'in this business, which it is apprehended will not bear a discovery at present. It is suspected that the letters were procured *out of some public office*: and that Mr. Temple is not so perfectly ignorant of all circumstances as the doctor's language seems to express.' This suspicion, it is well known, led to the duel between Mr. Whately, the brother of the correspondent of the American functionaries, and Mr. Temple.

Whether the precise mode in which Dr. Williamson is said to have gotten them, and just that sort of deception which he is said to have put upon the clerk, in one of the offices of state, be credible or not, it is not worth while to discuss. The gentleman from whom Dr. Hosack has derived the anecdote does not pretend to enter with precision into these details; and in every transaction of this kind so much depends on personal qualities, local circumstances, coincidences, and chances, that it is impossible to reason safely on any thing but a very accurate and minute detail. However, we see nothing improbable in the statement as it

stands, and as we have quoted it above from Dr. Hosack's memoir. So that the anecdote is in itself credible, and is reported by a person of credibility, likely, as a friend of Dr. Williamson, to have heard it, had it been true. This seems to be the amount of the presumption in favour of its authenticity.

We know of nothing that can be urged against the anecdote, but this, that the gentleman who communicates it to Dr. Hosack, and states that he himself had it from Dr. Williamson, does not, if we have an accurate recollection of his letter, intimate that he received it, with any injunction of secrecy, nor that Dr. Williamson made a mystery of it. It seems to us therefore somewhat unaccountable, that the anecdote should have remained so long concealed. We know of no motive, that could have led Dr. Williamson to conceal it from the public, that would not have led him also to conceal it from this friend as from every other, or if he communicated it to him, to have done it with a strong injunction of secrecy. This there is no appearance that he did. If our memory serves us, Dr. Hosack's informant in his letter, as yet unpublished, states that he repeatedly heard it from Dr. Williamson, and drops no hint that the doctor at any time enjoined secrecy upon him; as he hardly could have failed to do, had it been a secret of the kind that it must needs have been; made known, as it would seem, but to one individual, and by him only promulged after Dr. Williamson's decease.

Moreover, it is finally communicated to Dr. Hosack, not as a great mystery, of which the death of the principal person concerned has at length broken the seal, but as a piece of information accidentally sent to the author of the biographical memoir, in consequence of inquiries made to Bishop White for materials for such a biography; and then it is communicated with as little ceremony or note of admiration, as any other historical anecdote. This seems to us inconsistent with the idea that Dr. Williamson could have communicated it to his friend in strict confidence; as it seems to us equally difficult to explain how, without such strict confidence, the secret should have gone no farther. This wants explanation. The most probable explanation which suggests itself to us is, that it was in fact communicated under strict injunction of secrecy by Dr. Williamson to his friend, a secrecy

not to be violated during the doctor's life time : and that his friend, under what circumstances, and for what reasons, or by what accident, we know not, has omitted to make any mention of such an injunction. While we therefore wish for farther information with regard to this curious anecdote, we confess ourselves, on the whole, strongly disposed to acknowledge its authenticity.

We therefore feel grateful to Dr. Hosack for his instrumentality in making it public. We could wish that equal pains might be taken to ascertain and make public the authors of another of the acts, which engaged so much of the public attention in our early revolutionary history, we mean the destruction of the tea. Dr. Hosack, in the memoir before us, gives the name of one of those concerned in this bold and patriotic exploit, general Ebenezer Stevens. Other names are not unknown, and we believe there are individuals in our neighbourhood, abundantly able to furnish a list of all concerned in this affair, with all the secret history belonging to it. Why should they be concealed ? Why should facts, from the disclosure of which nothing but honour would redound to all concerned in them, be allowed to be forgotten, one after another, as the living depositaries of these secrets pass away ? We are particularly anxious that transactions like that of the destruction of the tea, should receive every possible illustration ; for independent of the political importance of that affair, it is such things as these, which are to furnish materials, if any thing is to furnish them, for our future Waverleys and Hearts of Mid Lothian.

It may seem a want of courtesy to summon an occasional performance, like that before us, to the bar of verbal criticism. We therefore but just observe in passing, that there is room for greater simplicity of style, that the poetical quotations are too numerous, and the translation of the Latin one, we trust, superfluous. The allusions to the religious character of the subject of the memoir seem to us occasionally to border on canting. The anecdote, in particular, of Dr. Williamson's parents, page 12th, is singularly injudicious.